



2008 STATE OF THE DISTRICT ADDRESS

U.S. Representative Ron Klein ***Twenty-Second District of Florida*** ***As Prepared For Delivery***

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for allowing me to present to you the State of the District. It is a pleasure to be with you. I see many familiar faces, along with some new friends. I would especially like to thank all of the local elected officials, community leaders and citizens that work so hard on our behalf every day.

I am here in the spirit of accountability – of keeping the promise that elected officials must report to the people they work for, in my case, the families and businesses of the 22nd District.

Our community is among the most vibrant, active and engaged in the country. It is a true honor and privilege to serve as your representative in Congress, and I am committed to matching your energy every day in Washington.

Let us be clear: the challenges we face are many, and the road ahead may be long. Yet a fundamental optimism pervades our nation, and our national spirit. We, as Americans, have risen to meet every challenge presented by history, and I know you share my confidence that we will do so once again.

It will take all of us working together to find solutions. Neither Republicans, Democrats nor Independents have a monopoly on good or bad ideas. We must have the best and the brightest individuals in our community, people from all backgrounds and walks of life, at the table in order to find sustainable, long-term solutions.

Today, I will share with you a brief review of where we have been over the last year, and more importantly, where we must go in the weeks and months ahead.

There is no doubt that these are difficult days. However, we have made real progress on many critical issues we have faced over the last year.

First, we have moved quickly to address the most important issue on everyone's mind: fixing our economy.

As a member of the Financial Services Committee, the main House committee that deals with economic issues, my first priority is getting South Florida's economy back on track. In order to do so, I have worked closely with local business leaders, including the Broward Alliance and the Economic Council of Palm Beach County, as well as the local Chambers of Commerce and small

and large business owners to identify key ways in which we can work together to support job growth in our community.

With their help, we held a seminar at Florida Atlantic University in May, attended by over 200 people, where we brought in experts from Washington to give advice to local small business owners on how to successfully compete for government contracts.

As we all know, creating good jobs and keeping them in our community is essential to our economic recovery. That is why I continue to work with and support our local community colleges and universities as they create training and degree programs that will open the door to high paying, cutting-edge jobs for our students in fields like biotechnology and scientific research.

In addition to business owners, there is another group that is hard-hit by our current economic crisis, and that is homeowners. People are losing their homeowners' insurance at the fastest rate ever, and too many families either can't get policies or can't afford them.

To address this issue, I fought for real reform that will increase the accessibility and affordability of homeowners' insurance. I worked closely with my Republican and Democratic colleagues to successfully pass the Homeowners' Defense Act. This legislation will pool the risk of natural disasters across state lines in order to bring down costs for homeowners in Florida and nationwide.

The national risk catastrophe bill passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support, and I look forward to working with the new President, House and Senate leaders to see it signed into law and bring much-needed relief to Florida homeowners.

In addition to these economic accomplishments, there is another area where we have made real progress this year, and that is standing up for our veterans and military service members. This is an issue that all of us, as Americans, agree is a top priority.

We have a fundamental responsibility to honor and respect every man and woman who has worn the uniform of this country. Since being elected to Congress, I have worked with others in focusing on making sure every single veteran in South Florida has access to the full range of benefits they have earned.

This year, our community successfully opened a brand-new, state-of-the-art VA outpatient facility in Broward County to serve our aging veterans, as well the new veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. We are also working to increase access to our outpatient facilities in Palm Beach County, as well as the VA hospital in Rivera Beach. We must and will ensure that our returning service members receive the highest quality physical and mental health services available.

In fact, access to medical care was one of the key goals I identified in my Five Star Veterans' Priority Plan. In this plan, I laid out specific ways to mandate full funding for veterans' health

care, clear the disability claims backlog, create a GI Bill for the 21st Century, strengthen benefits for National Guard and Reserves and guarantee health benefits to returning service members.

I am proud to say that many of these priorities are now law. This year, we successfully passed the largest funding increase in the history of the VA, as well as a brand-new GI Bill that will allow all of our returning service members to attend four years of college at no cost to them.

In developing our Five Star plan, I worked closely with our Palm Beach and Broward County Veterans' Advisory Boards. I look forward to regular meetings with this distinguished group, where I listen to local veterans and take their ideas to Washington. In cases like securing additional funding for middle-income veterans, we have been able to turn their requests into law.

In addition to working locally on behalf of our economy and our veterans, I have also worked with leaders in our community to address other critical issues, including beach re-nourishment, preserving our one-of-a-kind coral reefs, and supporting our local marine industry.

Our office has helped hundreds of people in our district access their veterans' benefits, receive their Social Security payments and secure their Medicare coverage, and obtain their visas and passports. I will continue to listen closely to all of your ideas as we come together to address the many challenges that still lie ahead.

As we get to work this year, first on our list must be getting our economy back on track.

From my discussions with local business leaders, it is clear to me that one of the most significant issues is the current lack of access and availability of credit for consumers and businesses.

We must continue to insist that every bank receiving federal money is helping loosen up the credit market to credit-worthy families, individuals and businesses. We are also demanding strict oversight of these banks, to ensure every dollar of taxpayer money is spent wisely.

In addition to oversight of the banks, we are working to develop an economic stimulus plan that will help everyday working families and business owners here in South Florida. In order to provide that relief, the stimulus must contain the right balance of tax cuts and targeted investment to reinvigorate the private sector, which is the engine of our economy, and revive consumer confidence.

The stimulus package must create jobs quickly and also make smart investments in long-term, tangible projects such as rebuilding roads and bridges, modernizing our transportation system and updating crumbling school buildings to make them energy efficient and wired for 21st century technology.

One example of this type of targeted, long-term investment is The Scripps Research Institute in Palm Beach County, which many of us worked to bring to our community. This cutting-edge facility is already making South Florida a world leader in medical and scientific research and will create thousands of jobs in research and manufacturing, as well as spark collaboration with our colleges and universities.

In Broward County, we can speed our economic recovery by ensuring that South Florida remains a tourist destination. I speak regularly with the Greater Ft. Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Broward County Tourism Development Council and hotel and restaurant owners, and I have brought their ideas to Washington. I have also worked successfully with the Marine Industries Association of South Florida to help marina owners and suppliers, who are key employers in Ft. Lauderdale, reduce costs.

There is no silver bullet, and I do not expect to see our economy turn around overnight. However, getting our economy back on track is a challenge that we must and will meet.

There is another challenge that I know our community is committed to meeting in the coming months and years. We will make Florida a leader in clean, affordable renewable energy. Florida should be leading the world in wave and solar energy, and we are taking steps to make that a reality.

We must stand behind our local entrepreneurs who have big ideas to make homes and businesses more energy efficient, as well as our scientific researchers on the verge of the next big breakthrough. That is why we worked to help the scientists at Florida Atlantic University secure one million dollars in federal funding to harness the clean-energy potential that lies just off our coastlines.

Florida can lead the way in the creation of new energy technologies and the jobs that come along with them. Our researchers and local business entrepreneurs are the best in the country, and with our support, they can create jobs and push our country into the next generation of energy alternatives.

Meeting this challenge starts with our children. In Palm Beach County, we have Pine Jog Elementary School, a green school that focuses its students on the use, conservation and development of alternative energy, as well as Park Vista High School, where students and teachers ingeniously built a biodiesel car. We must fight for more schools to follow their example and teach about energy alternatives, and encourage more businesses to open their doors and receive the tax credits that support investments in alternative energy ventures. With a little hard work, we will put Florida on the clean energy map.

These are just few of the most critical challenges facing our community, our state and our nation. But Americans are optimists, and whenever our nation has faced turbulent times, we have emerged even stronger.

For example, in December of 1862, as the Civil War raged and the Union faced defeat at Fredericksburg, President Abraham Lincoln spoke of the critical moment that faced the nation, and the responsibilities of government at such a time.

“Fellow citizens,” he said, “we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us.

“We---even we here---hold the power, and bear the responsibility.”

These powerful words echo across the centuries, and remind us that in times of crisis, the American people demand leadership.

Our country and our district have been confronted with challenges that require bold action and new ideas. This is not a time for tired partisanship, or the old political games of who gets the credit and who did the work.

We must put our differences aside and work together, Republicans, Democrats and Independents from all walks of life, to rebuild our economy and strengthen the fabric of our nation. I know that together, the people of the 22nd District and all of Florida will lead the way.

Thank you.